



# The German Werewolf And the Iraqi Guerrilla

by Captain Brian K. Glasshof

*A country exercised from the tyranny of a madman. Members of the national and local leadership at virtually every level outlawed — members of an ousted criminal regime. Intelligentsia that resisted the movement, ruthlessly eliminated by a paranoid dictator, leaving a nation without a vital personnel infrastructure. Fiscal infrastructure decimated by the effects of war. American troops and military leaders forced to grapple with a fanatical resistance using guerrilla tactics to frustrate operations and influence the local population. An indifferent local populace that changes disposition from one block to another.*

Although the scenario is familiar, the time and place was 1945 Germany concluding five years of world war. The similarities are much deeper than the sociopolitical landscape and the operational military decisionmaking that accompany it. The small-unit tactics that are currently used against coalition forces in Iraq are similar to those used by German resistance in 1945 against allied forces. We can draw from these experiences and lessons learned to better equip our forces for the current mission.

As German leaders grappled with a failing military campaign, some resurrected the centuries-old concept of guerrilla tactics. General Heinrich Himmler, leader of the Schutzstaffel (SS) and commander in chief of the home army, undertook

the responsibility to develop an organization, later named “Werewolf,” to “fight behind the front as a diversionary force,” and subsequently lead a paramilitary resistance, once the regular military capitulated.<sup>1</sup> Himmler placed SS Police General Pruetzmann in charge of this new secret organization, which successfully executed missions both behind enemy lines in the west, and in Berlin to counter the Russian advance. These Werewolf missions are similar in purpose and endstate to current Iraqi resistance and provide historical, as well as tactical perspective, to guerrilla resistance.

Initially, Werewolf activity focused on local leaders that cooperated with occupational forces. The most famous and successful of these attacks was in the city of Aachen against the American appointed Chief Burgomaster (mayor), Franz Oppenhoff. Aachen is a small town in the southwestern region of Germany that allied troops conquered.

Mayor Oppenhoff’s crime resulted from his cooperation with American occupational forces, which included discussions of how best to structure a defeated post-war Germany.<sup>2</sup> Himmler issued the “death sentence” for these actions and named the mission Operation Carnival. To execute the sentence, Himmler selected a Werewolf group of five, which included one woman. The group was tasked to parachute behind enemy lines, infiltrate into

the town, reconnoiter the objective, select the place to kill the mayor, and then execute actions on the objective. The lone female of the group, Isle Hirsch, conducted the night reconnaissance to ascertain Mayor Oppenhoff’s location and the composition/disposition of his security forces. Hirsch found the mayor’s home easily and discovered the extremely lax security, despite Oppenhoff’s fear of such a strike. After disseminating the intelligence to the remainder of her group, a three-man detail executed the killing. Once the objective was accomplished, the Werewolf team quickly broke contact and initiated exfiltration.

Although Operation Carnival was successful, it was not the norm for the duration of the war. More often, the success of the Werewolves depended on the Hitler youth during the defense of Berlin. During these operations, the Werewolf-trained soldiers executed guerrilla close combat tactics with great success. In one case, Adolf Hitler awarded the Iron Cross to a 12-year-old soldier who recorded 20 Russian tank kills.<sup>3</sup> The *SS Werewolf Combat Instruction Manual* provided the tactics for the exploits during the battle for Berlin, and best illustrates how the Werewolf fought at the small-unit level.<sup>4</sup>

The Werewolf organization, at its smallest level, consisted of four guerrillas and a leader. This five-man group was employed when operating in areas of tight

observation and was employed during the first phases of guerrilla warfare.<sup>5</sup> The first stage was the beginning of resistance, or guerrilla warfare, in which the situation was unclear or observation was very tight. During phase one, the objective was high payoff targets and harassment actions. These missions were quick strike and avoided decisive engagement.

Phase two included multiple groups or platoons with combat missions or the destruction of large objectives. Phase-two missions were only used when the situation was clear and in favorable terrain. In either type of mission, phase two involved decisive contact.

Phase three involved using task force-sized guerrilla organizations, composed of several platoons or companies, and was supported by the regular army. Operation Carnival was a phase-one mission. The goal of guerrilla warfare is the involvement of the general population in an uprising that overwhelms the enemy and allows for future offensive operations of the regular army.<sup>6</sup>

The two most advantageous tactics are interdiction and ambush.<sup>7</sup> Interdiction operations are surprise operations in the enemy's rear that result in the destruction of high payoff targets such as supply, communications, transportation, or civil engineering soft targets. Interdiction is best used when implemented during phase one of guerrilla warfare and, as such, seeks to avoid decisive contact. On the

other hand, the ambush is used throughout operations and is based on surprise. It is best used when integrated with mines and light automatic or antitank weapons. Ambush sites are more effective if the enemy cannot identify them as potential ambush sites, thus maintaining the necessary surprise component. Operation Carnival illustrates the use of interdiction, and the battle of Berlin is an example of successfully using ambushes.<sup>8</sup>

Superior reconnaissance, which provided superior intelligence, was essential to all Werewolf action.<sup>9</sup> An intelligence network gathered the necessary information/intelligence and was made up of individual scouts who worked independently.<sup>10</sup> Charismatic people, whom the local population considered helpful, often filled these scout positions.<sup>11</sup> Lightly equipped, small units then used the intelligence to maintain superior maneuverability.<sup>12</sup> Both Operation Carnival and the heroics of 12-year-old boys during the battle of Berlin relied on these basic principles. These principles continue today on the battlefield in Iraq.

The current environment in Iraq is similar to that of Germany in 1945. Iraqi fighters planned guerrilla tactics before the war began and implemented these tactics before the war concluded. Iraqi fighters and subsequent resistance groups incorporated essential elements of the Werewolf instruction manual, which produced their most successful engagements.<sup>13</sup> Un-

like the Werewolves, Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) elevated guerrilla tactics from phase one to phase two, and arguably phase three during the attack of the 507th Maintenance Company.

OIF resistance is based on the tactics of interdiction and ambushes. Interdiction is demonstrated daily with attacks on battalion supply lines and on operational targets such as aircraft approaching and departing Baghdad International Airport. Both are high payoff targets, specifically enumerated as interdiction targets in the Werewolf instruction manual.<sup>14</sup> In most cases, these attacks are conducted as part of phase one of guerrilla warfare as defined by the Werewolf instruction manual.<sup>15</sup> Small groups, ranging from three to five personnel, execute these operations and avoid decisive contact by attempting to destroy their targets and then break contact by using covered and concealed routes or withdrawing into friendly crowds. Flexibility and maneuverability are essential to the success and survivability of these attacks and the attackers.

Armament is usually light, only enough to destroy targets and rarely surpass rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), antitank guided missiles (for aircraft), and light automatic weapons for local security. Mortars are also employed, but are done so from a truck platform, or if dismounted, are dismounted quickly and only long enough to drop rounds and then remount the truck and exfiltrate. If heavier dismounted armament or additional ammunition is needed, caches seem favored over carrying additional weight or using additional forces. This was particularly true in the beginning of OIF when innumerable caches were regularly found throughout the entire region. When implementing interdiction, the biggest difference between OIF and Germany is the increased mobility and maneuverability of the attackers due to the availability of automobiles, which provide easy exfiltration.

The ambush is the most successful tactic used throughout the region. The ambush techniques used in OIF are usually executed with an improvised explosive device (IED) and sometimes in conjunction with small arms and RPG fire. If the ambush is executed with a small force of less than three to five personnel, then an IED is the method of choice. In this case, the Werewolf fundamental of avoiding decisive contact is achieved. The IED is detonated remotely from a safe distance

*"As German leaders grappled with a failing military campaign, some resurrected the centuries-old concept of guerrilla tactics. General Heinrich Himmler, leader of the Schutzstaffel (SS) and commander in chief of the home army, undertook the responsibility to develop an organization, later named "Werewolf" to "fight behind the front as a diversionary force," and subsequently lead a paramilitary resistance, once the regular military capitulated."*





*"The two most advantageous tactics are interdiction and ambush. Interdiction operations are surprise operations in the enemy's rear that result in the destruction of high payoff targets such as supply, communications, transportation, or civil engineering soft targets. Interdiction is best used when implemented during phase one of guerrilla warfare and, as such, seeks to avoid decisive contact. On the other hand, the ambush is used throughout operations and is based on surprise."*



that minimizes the opportunity for coalition forces to conduct action drills due to the inability to easily or quickly identify the enemy. If the enemy uses direct fire contact, it is not decisive in nature.

Resistance fighters might use direct fire in conjunction with IEDs, but only when the terrain strongly favors the guerrilla fighter. Initiating a near ambush with an IED, followed by subsequent small-arms fire and RPGs is a good example of direct fire. Guerrilla fighters use direct fire when attacking smaller groups, or when they are in position to withdraw into crowds, buildings, or canals. Supremacy is not in firepower (AK47 versus M2 or M240) but in the number of weapons systems and fighting positions. Direct fire is used from multiple locations and from different angles, which allows massing guerrilla firepower and simultaneous dispersement of coalition fire in multiple directions. Once direct fire is used, guerrilla forces continue using direct fires until coalition forces execute successful actions on contact. Successful actions on contact usually involve suppression to allow forces to break contact and execute medical evacuation.

Guerrilla forces also used the fundamentals of flexibility, maneuverability, and reconnaissance to execute the hasty ambush on the 507th Maintenance Compa-

ny. With the situation unclear, guerrilla forces minimized contact and collected information while repositioning forces. When the 507th, believing their previous route to be clear, backtracked through the town, the guerrillas attacked, achieving surprise. The guerrilla forces massed in a decisive engagement once they realized they had sufficient firepower to destroy the entire coalition force that remained in the engagement area.

Coalition forces can use three principles of war against guerrilla tactics; they can better use mass, security, and economy of force to defeat the current threat. Improving mass will allow the coalition to maintain firepower superiority in each engagement. The ability of guerrilla tactics to use a much smaller force and gain firepower superiority with that smaller force can be mitigated. Particularly against the ambush, coalition forces can mass forces against any enemy that uses direct fire systems. Currently, enemy guerrilla forces identify soft targets or small combat patrols as ambush targets. Combat patrols are usually no more than three vehicles and can be as few as two vehicles. If one vehicle is hit with an IED and rendered combat ineffective, this leaves one or two vehicles to react to contact and simultaneously conduct medical evacua-

tion. The remaining vehicles are not capable of returning fire in multiple directions and mass fires. In this case, all fires are dispersed and not massed. To mass fires, a second three-vehicle section is mandatory. The second section can conduct the patrol behind the lead section. If the lead section gains contact in an ambush, the second section maintains the freedom of maneuver and can action to a favorable position to mass fires on a specific target.

One section massing fires can quickly defeat or destroy one fighting position that is no longer concealed. Destroying a flank firing position can quickly allow friendly forces to reorient fires on the remaining two or three fighting positions. Initial suppression by the second section will allow the lead section in contact to more easily coordinate its degraded fires to suppress the two fighting positions that remain. Once the initial fighting position is destroyed, the orientation of the second section can shift to the next fighting position. Once friendly forces demonstrate the ability to mass fires, enemy forces will break contact.

Using a second section as a follow-on force for all combat patrols provides security. Increasing the patrol's depth prohibits the enemy from effectively flank-



*"The current environment in Iraq is similar to that of Germany in 1945. Iraqi fighters planned guerrilla tactics before the war began and implemented these tactics before the war concluded. Iraqi fighters and subsequent resistance groups incorporated essential elements of the Werewolf instruction manual, which produced their most successful engagements."*

ing friendly forces. Additionally, during military operations in urban terrain, a section in depth enables the patrol to adequately scan building tops located immediately next to the first patrol. It is much easier to scan rooftops from a distance. Snipers and other rooftop forces wait for the signal that friendly forces are in the engagement area before revealing themselves, and then doing so in a favorable condition. With a section in depth, friendly forces will more quickly identify ambush forces on rooftops or upper floors, and subsequently, more easily suppress those ambush forces.

If an ambush is conducted with an IED only, without direct fire, the section in depth provides the needed personnel to begin cordon operations. It is nearly impossible for one section with casualties to conduct cordon operations. Guerrilla forces will immediately attempt to break contact, and if possible, exfiltrate the ambush site. The second patrol is more capable of cordoning the area and eliminating the freedom of maneuver necessary for the guerrilla to expedite the withdrawal. Once an area is cordoned, additional forces might be capable of conducting sweeps and searches to identify enemy forces.

Mandating patrols consisting of two three-vehicle sections is an appropriate application of economy of force. The enemy is force oriented; they must attack friendly forces to obtain any success. By concentrating forces in fewer patrols, the total area affected by patrols is reduced. However, since the enemy must attack friendly forces, the amount of vehicles in contact at any given time increases. Therefore, fewer patrols are out of position to gain contact or support friendly forces in contact. Otherwise, patrols that are not in contact when other friendly forces make contact with an ambush are patrols without relevant purpose.

Guerrilla tactics used today in OIF are based on the same fundamentals of the German Werewolf of World War II. Understanding the similarities and adapting these fundamentals to the contemporary operating environment provides the historical perspective needed to counterattack successfully. Rather than patrol a larger percentage of assigned areas, concentrate forces in fewer patrols to gain mass and security, and gratuitously improve economy of force.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Charles Whiting, *Hitler's Werewolves*, New York, Stein and Day, pp. 66 and 164.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., xxx.

<sup>4</sup>Michael C. Fagnon, *SS Werewolf Combat Instruction Manual*, Boulder, CO, Paladin Press, 1982, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 45, 47.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 45-47.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

Captain Brian K. Glasshof is assistant G3 Plans Officer, 3d Infantry Division, Fort Stewart, GA. He received a B.A. from Centre College and a J.D. from University of Memphis. His military education includes Combined Arms and Services Staff School, Armor Officer Basic Course, and Armor Captains Career Course. He has served in various command and staff positions, to include S3 and XO, Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 2d Squadron, 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment (2ACR), and scout platoon leader, E Troop, 2d Squadron, 2ACR, Fort Polk.